

Major Kūṭiyāṭṭam Artists and Families

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Though Chakyars necessarily receive their training both in the presentation of Kūṭiyāṭṭam and the exposition of Kūttu, usually they do not excel equally in both. Those better at oral delivery, than in visual appeal or histrionic talent specialize in Kūttu and take the role of Vidūṣhaka in the performances. Those endowed with good looks and artistic skill become actors of great calibre. In the past, in classical arts like Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Kūttu, there were many old masters, who have had glorious careers as artists, and this essay tries to remember some of them.

KUTTANCHERRY

Kuttancherry Itteeri Chakyar

In the course of time many Chakyar families have shifted from their original locations, but Kuttancherry Chakyar Maṭham, situated in Nelluvayi near Wadakkancherry, still remains in the same place. Itteeri Chakyar, who belonged to this family and a contemporary of Melppattur Narayana Bhattatiri, was a master of oral expression. He is believed to have used the *prabandhas* of Melppattur for the first time, in his exposition of Kūttu. Almost all the Chakyars who hailed from the Kuttancherry family became famous mainly for their *vak* (verbal expression). Humour in oral expression was a noted trait in their family.

Kuttancherry Mootha (Senior) Chakyar

Usually a Namboothiri who goes astray due to force of circumstances becomes a Chakyar. Though such occasions were rare, a Namboothiri who gets excommunicated is received into a Chakyar family which is willing to accept him. (While the Namboothiris follow a patriarchal system, the Chakyars have adopted matriarchy in their community). There was the system of '*chorukotuttetukkuka*' (accepting the new member by offering him rice). Thus Neelakanthan Namboothiri from Perumanam region became a member of Kuttancherry Chakyar Maṭham. He was an expert at Vedic chanting. He is said to have initially worshipped Lord Shasta of Tiruvallakkavu temple by bestowing offerings, for gaining mastery in Vedic chanting, and after his excommunication repeated the offering to forget his skill. Finally, when he became a Chakyar, he seems to have done it a third time, for attaining proficiency in oral narration. Because he was the seniormost among his contemporaries, he was as known 'Mootha' Chakyar.

Mootha Chakyar became famous, either due to the blessings of Lord Shasta or due to his own inherent talent. His teacher was Mani Paramesvara Chakyar, who was peerless in



Kali (Red Beard — Ammannur Madhava Chakyar) in *Balivadham*.

Ravana (Katti — Kalamandalam Sivan Namboothiri) in *Toranayuddham*.





Above: Ravana
(Katti — Margi Madhu)
in *Udyana Pravesam*.

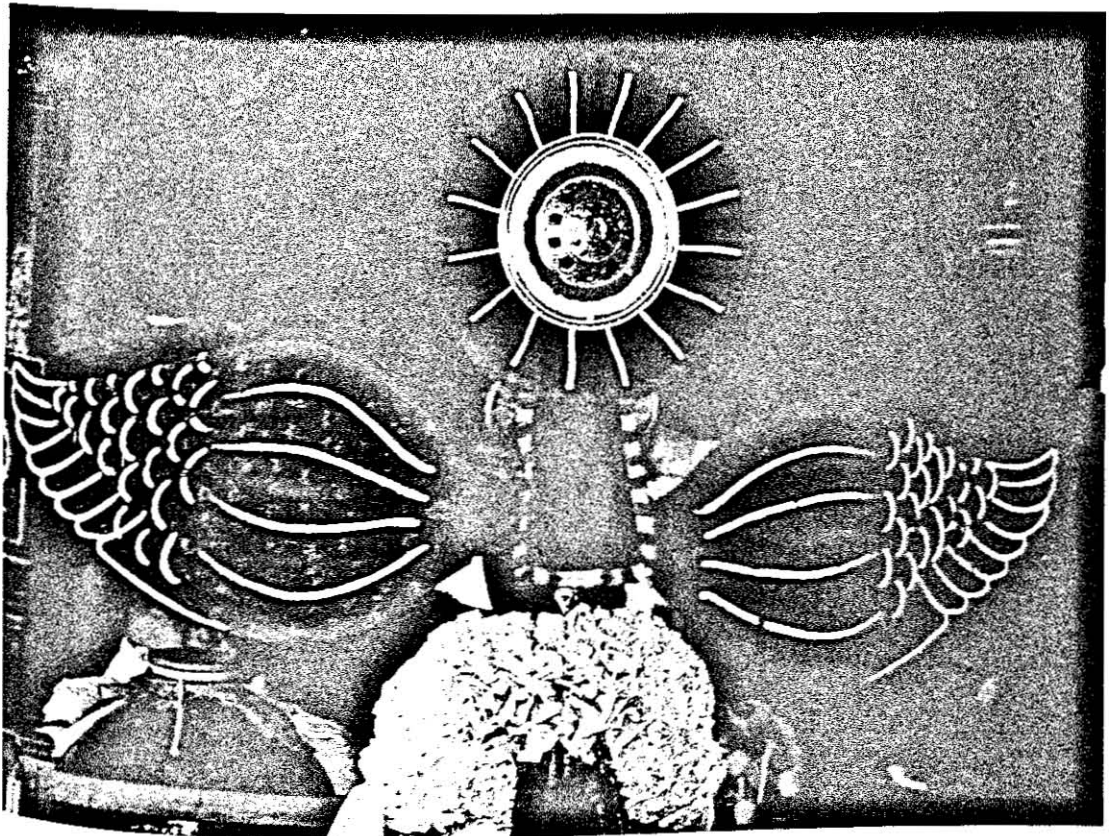
Right: Sugriva (Black
Beard — Ammannur
Parameswaran) in
Balivadham.





Usha Nangiar performing Nangiar Kuttu.

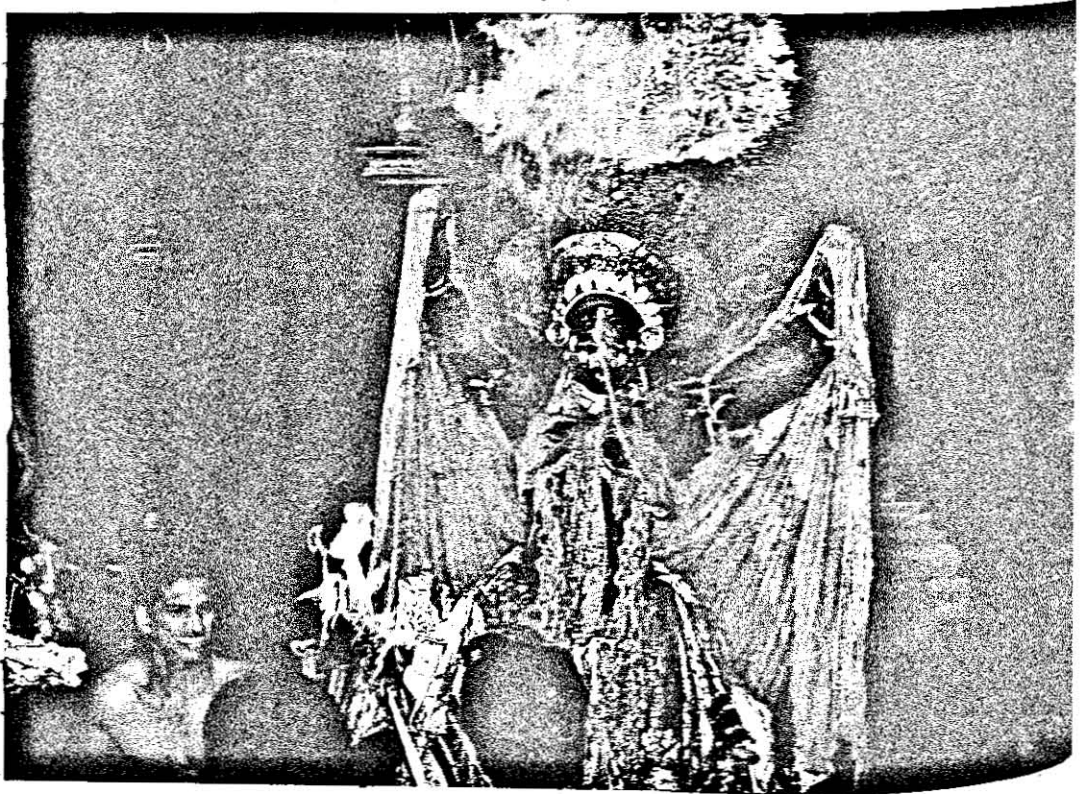
Jatayu (Bird) in *Jatayuvadhankam*—a rear view.

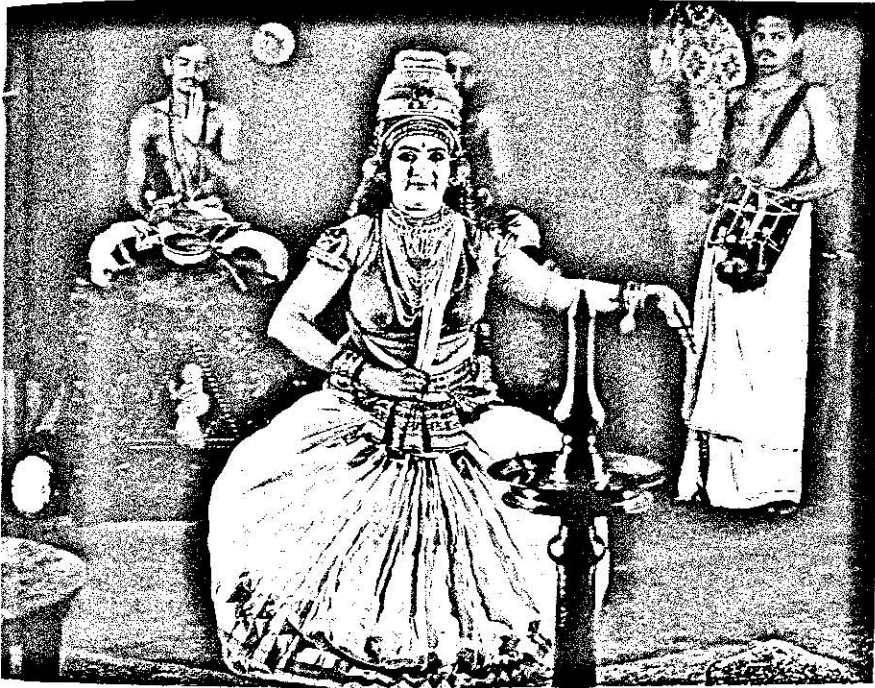




Ajjuka (Kalamandalam Girija) and Sakhi (Kalamandalam Sailaja) in *Bhagavadajjuka*.

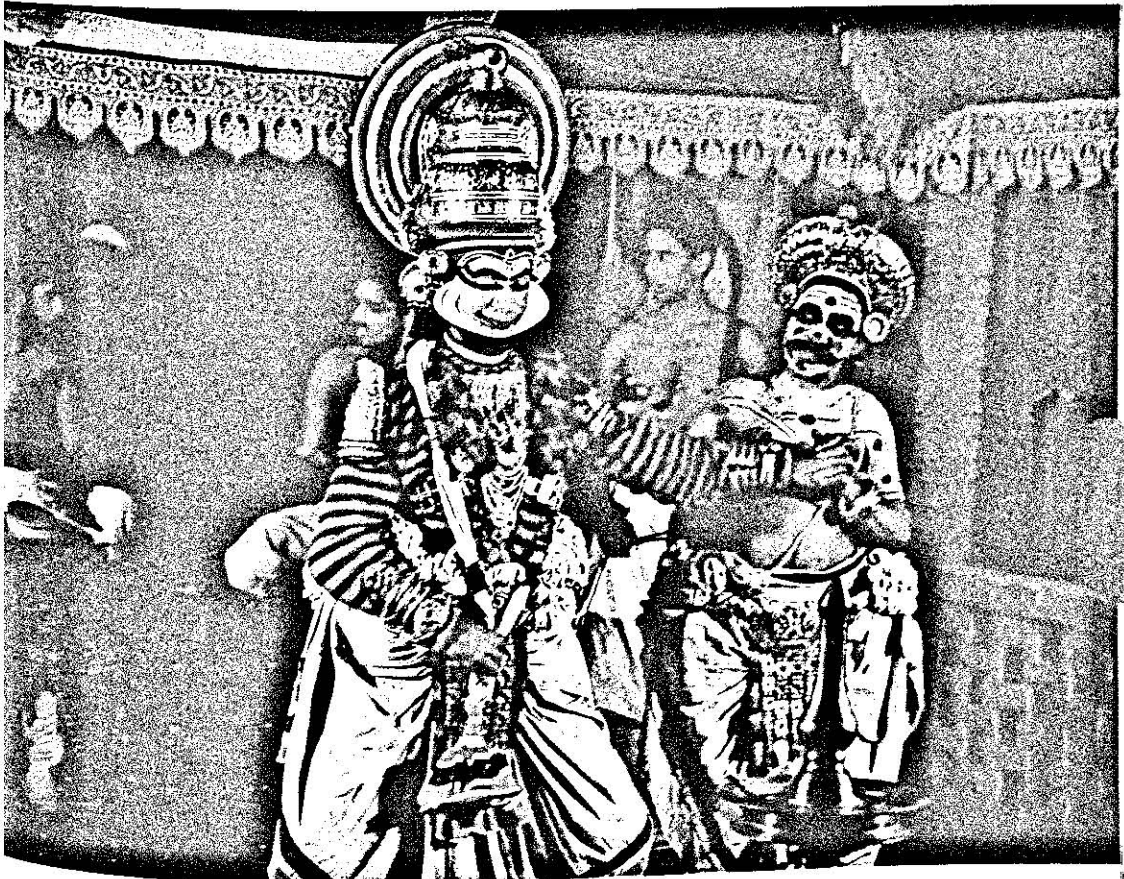
Surpanakha (Kalamandalam Rama Chakyar) in *ninam* ('blood-display') after her disfigurement in *Surpanakhankam*.





Left: Margi Sathi in
Nangiar Kottu.

Below: Vidushaka
(Moozhikulam
Kochukuttan Chakyar)
and Samvarana
(Pazhuppu—Margi
Sajeev) in
Tapatisamvarana.



at: Ammannur Parameswara
kyar as Hanuman (White Beard)
nguliyankam at Irinjalakuda
ampalam.

ow : A scene from *Balivadham*
to right: Hanuman
amandalam Radhakrishnan).
riva (Kalamandalam Rama
kyar), Bali (Kalamandalam
n Namboothiri), Lakshmana
cha) and Rama (Paccha).



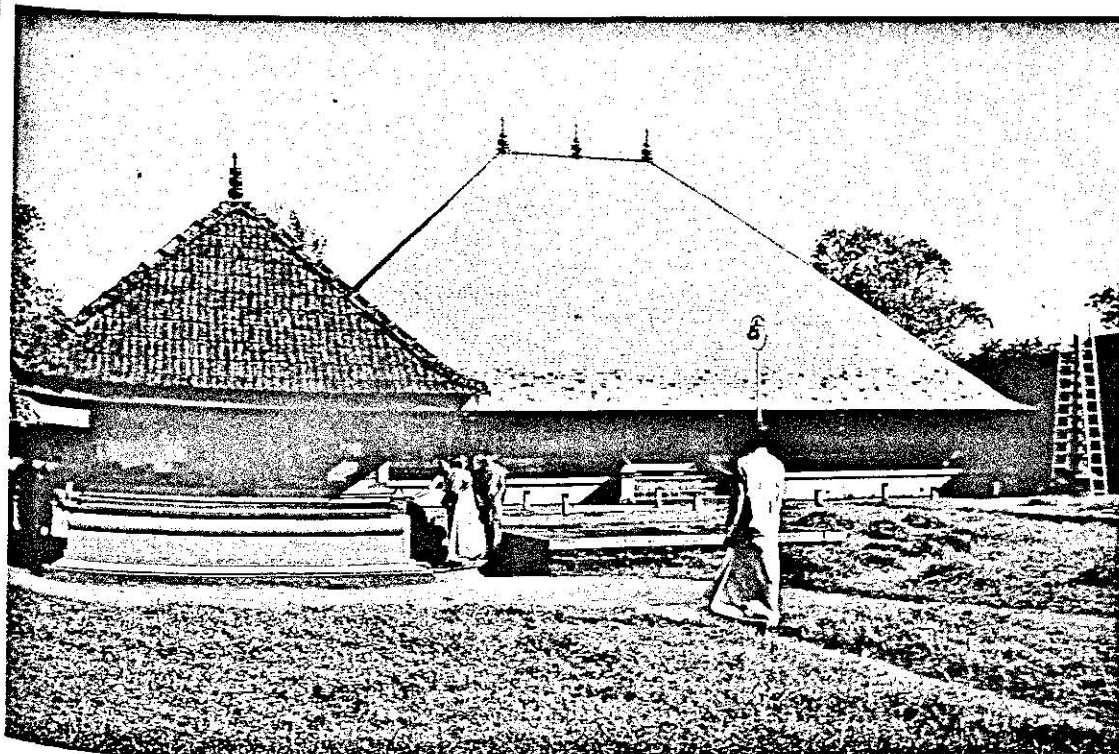
Photograph: Sangeet Natuk A-

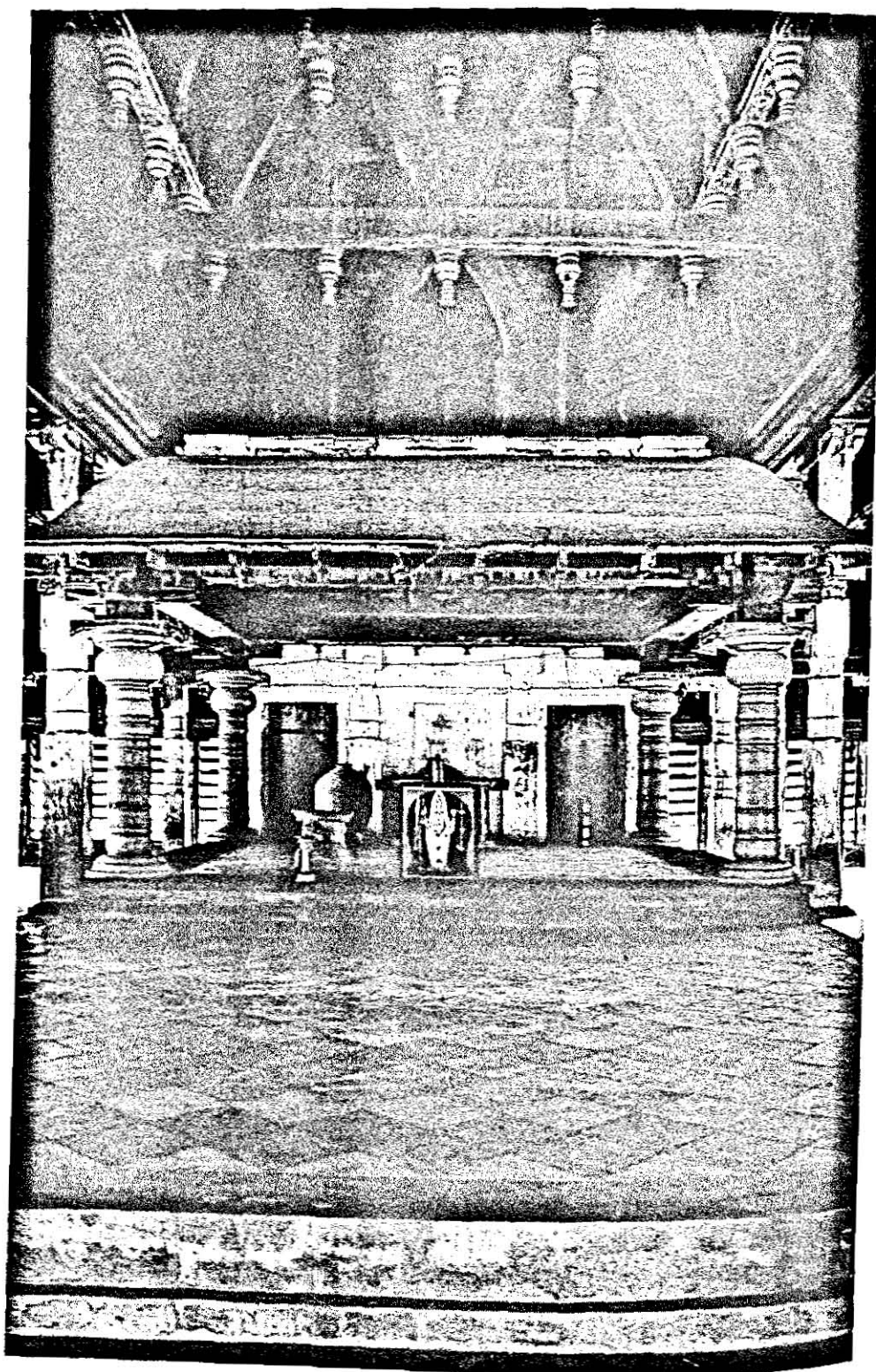




Ammannur Madhava Chakyar making up as Vidushaka.

View of Kuttampalam at Vadakkunathan temple.





The interior of the Kuttampalam at Irinjalakuda.



Painkulam Rama Chakyar as Ravana.



Ammannur Madhava Chakyar as Ravana in *Kailasodddharanam*.

Mani Madhava Chakyar as Ravana.





Painkulam Rama Chakyar as Hanuman in *Toranayuddham*.



Mani Madhava Chakyar as Vidushaka.



Left: Painkulam Rama Chakyar as Vasantaka
in *Mantrankam*.

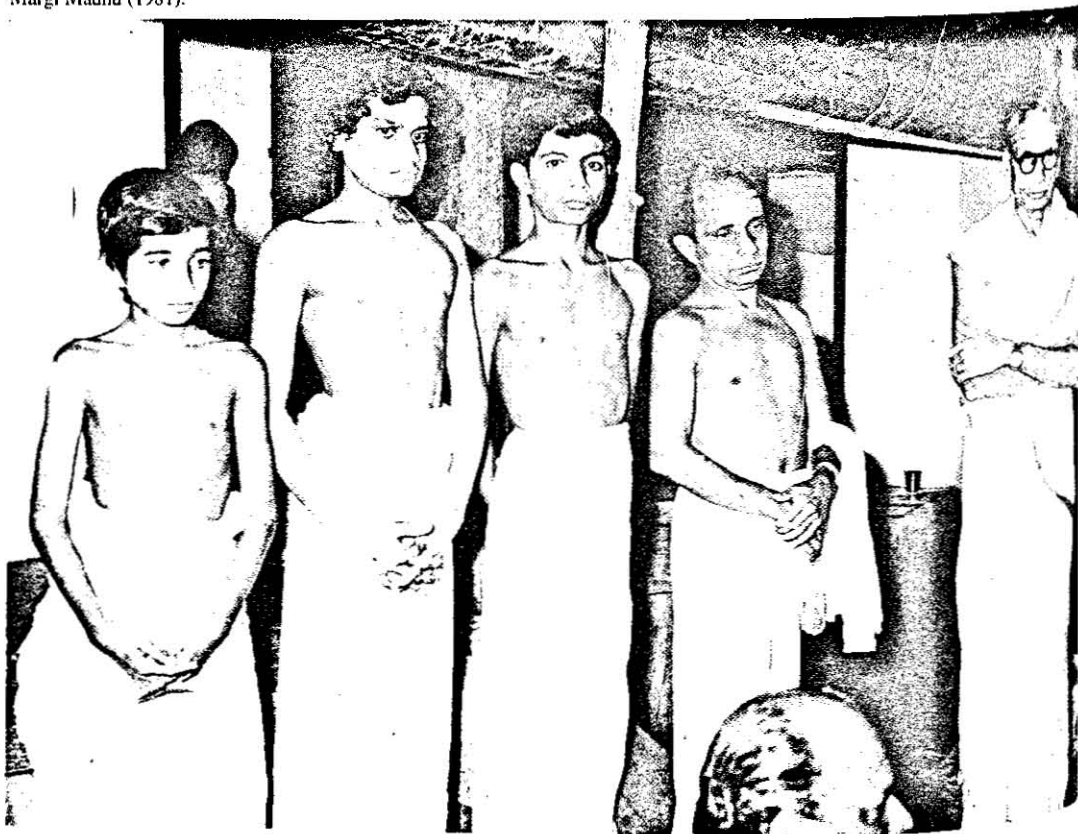
Below: C.K. Krishnan Nambiar and P.K. Narayanan
Nambiar.





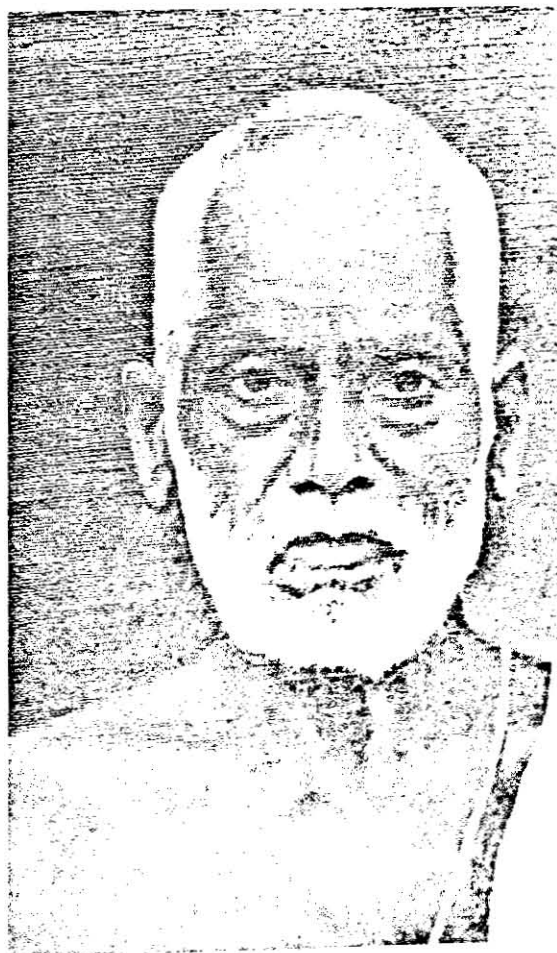
Margi Madhu and Unnikrishnan (1981).

Right to left: Ammannur Madhava Chakyar, Moozhikulam Kochukuttan Chakyar, Margi Narayanan Sajeev, Margi Raman, Margi Madhu (1981).





Pazhulam Rama Chakyar.



Kidangur Rama Chakyar.



Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair (left) and Ammannur Madhava Chakyar (right), 1981.

*vak**. Like Itteeri Chakyar, he also popularized the *prabandhas* of Melppattur by using them in his Kūttu. He lived during the 19th century (1805-1885)

Kuttancherry Narayana Chakyar

In the next generation after Mootha Chakyar, Narayana Chakyar—who was the nephew and disciple of Itteeri Chakyar—became famous in *vak*, like his illustrious ancestors. He had a natural flair and aptitude for humour. His Vidushaka scenes were also very famous.

A Chakyar while presenting Kūttu has the freedom to criticize anyone among the audience, however high his status and social position. He need not exempt even the king. On one occasion, Narayana Chakyar giped at the Senior King who ruled Cochin

Those were times when caste superiority, as well as gradations within the same caste, had an overriding importance. The Namboothiris belonging to one region (Travancore) were supposed to be inferior in status; and their ladies were not allowed to wear bangles. The King of Cochin had the uncontested right to decide on matters relating to caste gradations among Kerala brahmins. So Namboothiri leaders belonging to that region approached the king for granting the right to wear bangles for their women; for this they also agreed to pay suitable compensation, as per His Majesty's demand. The Senior King, who was at that time doing the year-long rites of his deceased mother, put forth the demand that the Nampoothiris should provide sufficient quality of jaggery (molasses) for the grand feast that was to ensue at the culmination of twelve months! This palace secret became the talk of the town. While performing the role of Vidushaka in Tripunithura temple, Narayana Chakyar in his 'Asana' (Eating) exposition recited the following verse:

Toṭuvān tuniyunneram

potiyunnoru śarkara

taruvān maṭiyillaññior

kkiṭuvān vaḷa kaiku nan

(For those people who do not hesitate to provide fresh stocks of jaggery, I will provide bangles for the hands.)

When the Chakyar recited this *śloka* putting due emphasis on the vital points and reinforcing the idea through his facial expressions, the audience understood the implication. The King decided not to accept the Jaggery. Today, since caste fanaticism is on the wane, this incident may appear childish.

Once when Narayana Chakyar went to Chengamanad, the people decided to hold a Kūttu in the temple. The Chakyar sent one of his nephews to Moozhikulam to fetch costumes. When the head of the family—the great Ammannur Cheriya Parameswara Chakyar received the letter, he told his nephew to take the best costumes for the Chakyar. When he got everything, Narayana Chakyar asked his nephew, "Did he say anything?" "He didn't tell me anything. He told his nephew to send good costumes." "He said that?" "Did he actually say that, or conveyed the idea through gesture?" The question put forward by Narayana Chakyar was in fact a reply. There is a saying that 'The Chakyar gives more importance to costume and make-up,' and this is what Ammannur Chakyar meant when he referred to "good costumes." It was well known that Parameswara

* This information was provided by Mani Madhava Chakyar; but considering their periods, it does not seem to be correct—Ed.

Chakyar was not as much of an expert in *vak* as he was in *vesha*. When Narayana Chakyar died in 1892, he had not completed sixty years.

Kuttancherry Damodara Chakyar

There has been no other actor who became as famous at such a young age as Cheriya Narayana Chakyar. His teacher was Raman Nambiar, the Pathaka specialist, who took his training in Sanskrit under Pottayni Govinda Menon. He had an extraordinary talent in *vak*, and so he earned a name in *Kuttu* as well as in the role of Vidushaka. But in 1918 at the early age of nineteen, he died of smallpox. Before that he had also performed *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* three times, and become a reputed actor. After him, nobody from Kuttancherry family took part in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* performances.

AMMANNUR

There have been very few Chakyars who became masters both in *vak* and *vesha* alike. Usually those who specialize in *vesha* do not have the facility of verbal expression, and vice versa. It is said: 'Potiyil has *vak*, Ammannur *aṭṭam* and Kuttancherry *phaliṭam* (humour)' It is said that the Namboothiris belonging to Irinjalakkuda region, in their daily salutations to the Lord at the temple, used to offer one salutation for the benefit of the Chakyars with the prayer: "May Ammannur Ittiyamman be able to perform!" such was the influence of the Chakyar in that society. In any case there is evidence that Ammannur Chakyars had extraordinary skill in the art of *abhinaya*.

The ancestral family of Ammannur was in Koppam, near Pattambi. In those days, once while narrating *Kūṭu*, Ammannur Chakyar criticized the ruling King of Vellatra by revealing a cruel deed done by the king. Later, fearing the wrath of the king, the Chakyar had to leave that place and came to Tirumoozhikkulam. In 1874 one branch from the family settled in Irinjalakkuda.

Ammannur and Cheriya Parisha families are closely related through adoption of a member about a hundred years ago. However, there is difference in their systems of training. Actually each Chakyar family has its own training method in the traditional system of education. Though all Chakyars accept the Attaprakaram of the plays, there are notable differences in methods of presentation of *kriyas* and their methods, rituals and conventions, in the rendering of *slokas* as well as in *vesha*. But these differences do not affect the spectator. On the stage, while the *pīṭha* is put by Ammannur on the right hand side, Cheriya Parisha puts it on the left. Ammannur ties the tail for a monkey *vesha* on the left, but Cheriya Parisha has it on the right, slanted sideways.

Sankukarna in Toranayuddha has a *paccha* make-up, but Potiyil Chakyar uses a make-up, somewhat resembling *katti*. However, such minor differences do not affect the aesthetic appeal of *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*.

During the time of Melpattur Bhattathiri, there was a Chakyar called Ammannur Ittiyamman, who became renowned for the role of Garuda in *Nagananda*. There is a *sloka* on him:

Ammannūritṭiyamman paricoṭu
 kurunattil pirannoru neram
 cemme vannoru marī śiva śiva
 parayāvalla nāgādhipannum
 Kūttāṭum māṭamatī kurupatihṛdayam
 tānumoṭṭere vāṭi
 Kūttārkūttāṇṇaḷ kūṭi palajanamapi
 chennu nīrāṭiyoti
 Mancānatharthasampannāt
 Dhruva chityammanam naṭan
 Paranna neram ruṣṭastē
 Nāgāḥ prītim varām yayuḥ

The flight of Garuda in *Nagananda* is very complicated in stage presentation, and has not therefore been shown for a long time now.

Ammannur Valia (Senior) Paramesvara Chakyar

During his young days, there was none to teach him the art of his family tradition. Still he learnt poems and plays, and gained mastery over Sanskrit from his own mother who was a Sanskrit scholar. Because of his great interest in acting, he took part in a play organised in Paravur, and toured all places up to Kanyakumari along with the troupe. Since there was a Namboothiri among them who used to attend 'Murajapam' at Trivandrum, they got a chance to perform in front of Kochurama Varma Maharaja in Poojappura palace. The king liked the acting of the young Paramesvara Chakyar. When he found out that the actor is a Chakyar and that he did not study the traditional art form for lack of means, the king made arrangements for him to learn it. In those days in Chengannur Maṭham there was a Nangiar who used to perform roles in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. She, along with her brother, gave lessons in Kūṭiyāṭṭam to Paramesvara Chakyar. As per the instructions of the king, he learned parts of *Ascharyachudamani*.

When he took his training for four years in Chengannur, Paramesvara Chakyar became a good actor. At that time, with the permission of the King, he used to go to Moozhikulam to visit his mother. He married the daughter of his teacher and spent another four years in Chengannur. During this time, he used to go to Trivandrum, meet the king and also perform in front of him.

After he returned home to his old mother, he visited Travancore only rarely. When his nephew and disciple Paramesvaran became famous, he became Valia Paramesvara Chakyar. He died in 1818, at the age of eighty.

Ammannur Cheriya Paramesvara Chakyar

Born in 1799, Paramesvara Chakyar, like his uncle, became a renowned actor.

Maharaja Utram Tirunal desired to teach *rasabhinaya* to the famous Kathakali actor Isvara Pillai, who was also his ward.

On enquiry he found out that Paramesvara Chakyar was the most talented actor. The king sent for him and made him settle down in Trivandrum. But a Chakyar as a rule does

not give lessons to anyone other than a Chakyar. These traditions were still maintained in those days. The Maharaja conducted seven performances of *Asokavanikankam* Kūṭiyāṭṭam for training Isvara Pillai. A talented actor like Isvara Pillai can also learn the art by seeing. He must have found the acting—especially the manipulation of the eyes, in Kūṭiyāṭṭam—as extremely useful in his own performances.

After receiving several honours including the bestowal of a golden bracelet (*virasīṅghala*) from the Maharaja, Paramesvara Chakyar returned to Moozhikulam and resumed his acting with renewed vigour. The role of Ravana in *Asokavanikankam* is the ultimate test for an actor's skill. It is believed that there was none to equal him in the performance of that role.

Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aitihiyamāla* describes how once a Chakyar simulated the act of throwing a stone at a charging dog and made it run away, thereby incurring the wrath of its owner, an Englishman. It was done by Ammannur Cheriya Paramesvara Chakyar himself. Actually he had thrown the stone, and not pretended to do so; but he made the Englishman understand that the act could be made to look realistic, if done properly. At the end of that account, the author (Sankunni) writes: "The article ends here, recording that this person is a member of the same family as Paramesvara Chakyar who received the golden bracelet from the Maharaja of Cochin." The 'person' referred to here is Ammannur Chachu Chakyar.

Cheriya Parisha Madhava Chakyar who became a renowned actor in the succeeding generation was a disciple of Paramesvara Chakyar. This great actor left home for Varanasi in 1865, and did not return. It is believed that he might have died in the same year.

Ammannur Madhava Chakyar (Kochukuttan)

Madhava Chakyar, the son of Potiyil Narayana Chakyar (the great master of *vak*) and the uncle of Chachu Chakyar was born in 1876. He had his lessons from Ammannur itself, and like his own ancestors, became renowned in *vesha*. His notable roles were Sri Rama in Surpanakhanka, Sugreeva in Balivadhama, Hanuman in Toranayuddha. His acting gave prominence to *Virarasa*. Madhava Chakyar became a favourite of the erstwhile ruler of Cochin, who was a great scholar himself. Madhava Chakyar died in 1924.

Ammannur Chachu Chakyar

He was born in 1881, and was trained by Cheriya Parisha Paramesvara Chakyar. Like his teacher, he also became famous for *vak*. In recent times, there has been none to excel him in the exposition of Kūṭtu and the performance of the role of Vidushaka.

Chachu Chakyar was adept at the presentation of all *prabandhas*. He also had an excellent voice. When he used to narrate the story of Rukmangada, etc. it was common for people to get so moved as to break into tears.

Once the Maharaja of Cochin (who had abdicated his throne) told him. "We also know how to explain the meaning of *slokas*. We come to listen to Kūṭtu not merely for this. A Chakyar should know the act of satire. If you want, you can make fun of me." Chachu Chakyar did not miss that opportunity. In *Ramayana Prabandha*. Ravana tells Sri Rama:

Strīvipreṇa vanikasam vijayinam

rajyāt kromopāgatāt
 Bhraṣṭam mūlaphalāśinam laghudhiyā
 magressasaram Raghava!
 Janetvamanarānya vamsā nrpaśum tvam
 mām ca jānāsi kim
 Dordandā pratighāta garva paribhū-
 tei rāvaṇam Rāvaṇam.

Using this occasion, the Chakyar directed his satire at the king. Looking point-blank at the king he asked: "Did you leave, or were forced to leave?" If the king felt irritated and foolish about this reference to his abdication, he did not show it. He honoured Chachu Chakyar by offering a gift of cloth to him and said: "So you are slowly gaining confidence, aren't you?" In 1968, Chachu Chakyar died, but he had retired from performances a few years earlier. Paimkulam Rama Chakyar and his own nephew Madhava Chakyar are his disciples.

POTIYIL

The Chakyars of Potiyil had their ancestral family near Vellarappalli, but in 1790 they settled in Manganam in Travancore. Narayana Chakyar, born in 1848 became known for *vak*. During his life time, he was peerless in the art of narration and in Vidushaka's role. His famous *prabandhas* were *Dutu*, *Subhadraharanam* and *Patracharitam*.

Once, while rendering Kūttu in Kollam, he happened to criticize the king, and thus became the object of his anger. Because of this, he did not go for performances in temples administered by the government; but subsequently he happened to be noticed by Visakham Tirunal, the ruler of Travancore. Once when the king came to visit Ambalappuzha temple, the Chakyar also happened to be there. When the king found out about the Chakyar, he decided to have a Kūttu that afternoon itself. It was ordered to be held in the 'oottupurā (the dining hall). Though the building was in a dilapidated condition, it was hurriedly cleaned up and made ready for the king's visit. The story narrated was *Subhadraharana*. During his performance, the Chakyar vividly described the pitable condition of the building and the difference that came about due to the king's visit. The Chakyar knew flattery also not merely criticism and rebuke. In any case the king was happy, for he bestowed a golden bracelet on the Chakyar, and ordered the repair of the building. His Vidushaka found a perfect match in Cheriya Parisha Madhava Chakyar's role as hero. Their combined acting was greatly favoured by one and all.

Narayana Chakyar died in 1897. When a successor was born in Potiyil family with the same name, he came to be known as Valiya (Senior) Narayana Chakyar.

Potiyil Neelakanṭha Chakyar

Neelakantha Chakyar, the brother of Narayana Chakyar, had the ambition that he should be second to none in Kūttu and Kūṭiyāṭṭam, and so he diligently studied Sanskrit to become a good scholar. Though he had rigorous training for about twelve years, he could not attain a pre-eminent position either in *vak* or in *vesha*. His elder brother was better in *vak*, while Cheriya Parisha Madhava Chakyar was peerless in *vesha*. Therefore

Neelakantha Chakyar studied law and practised in civil and criminal courts in Alappuzha. In those days there was no need for a lawyer to know English. As a lawyer he earned a good name, and many people used to assemble to hear his argument of a case. However, he had to leave Alappuzha because of some problems caused by his jealous colleagues. He left the job and served as Manager of Vanjippuzha.

Even as a lawyer, Neelakantha Chakyar used to perform in Kūttu and Kutiyattam. His role as hero in *Subhadradhananjaya* was specially noteworthy. He excelled in *śṅgāra* roles. Though he could not come up to the level of Madhava Chakyar, he had a significant place among the actors of his time. At the age of sixty-one, in 1910 Neelakantha Chakyar died. After these stalwarts their nephews Kochu Narayana Chakyar (1863-1924) and grand-nephew Narayana Chakyar (1886-1966) became renowned in *vesha*. Kochu Narayana Chakyar was also good in *vak*. He gave lessons in *natya* to Takazhi Sankaran Namboothiri, the Kathakali actor.

CHERIYA PARISHA

Cheriya Parisha Madhava Chakyar

Cheriya Parisha Chakyar family belongs to Kidangur in Kottayam district. It should be noted that before Madhava Chakyar, the eminent actor, there was no one in the family who earned a name for himself in acting.

In those days, Madhava Chakyar was unequalled in *vesha*, both because of his handsome appearance and his inborn talent. Born in 1842, he studied *kavyas* and *natakas* from his own native place, and proceeded to Muzhikulam to take lessons from Ammannur Cheriya Paramesvara Chakyar. Gradually he became adept in handling all the *nayaka* roles in Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

While receiving training in Muzhikulam, the young Madhava Chakyar heard that Isvara Pilla Vicharippukar was arriving at the palace of Parur Raja and that there was Kathakali performance that evening. Madhava Chakyar, having heard of this great actor from his younger days, decided not to waste this golden opportunity to go and see the performance. Without the anyone's knowledge, he reached the palace of Parur Raja. There is an unwritten rule that a Chakyar should not watch a Kathakali performance. Disregarding the rush and commotion, the Chakyar positioned himself near the stage lamp. That day Vicharippukar performed the role of Duryodhana in *Uttarasvayamvaram*. Vicharippukar noted that a young man was watching his performance with a rare interest; all the *rasas* on his face correspondingly got reflected in the young man's face: A surprised Vicharippukar turned towards the main singer and asked him to send the young man in, to meet him after the performance.

After Trigarta's entrance when Vicharippukar retired into the green-room, Madhava Chakyar hurriedly got up to go back without his teacher's knowledge. When the singer stopped him, saying, "don't go. Vicharippukar wants to see you" the young man was very upset. The singer also thought that perhaps the young man might have picked up one of the diamonds that accidentally fell off from Vicharippukar's diamond-studded headgear;

and that seeing this, Vicharippukar wanted to fetch him.

When the young man approached the green-room, Vicharippukar asked: "Do you want to learn Kathakali? Can you come to Trivandrum with me?" When he found out that he was a Chakyar and a disciple of Cheriya Paramesvara Chakyar, he felt very happy and sent him back, by paying due respects to his guru.

Madhava Chakyar's famous role was as Ravana in Asokavanikanka. According to scholars, no one could perform the Kūṭiyāṭṭam scene 'Himakara' as effectively as Madhava Chakyar. Similarly, his 'Parvativiraha' in *Toranayuddha* was highly commendable. Though he excelled in *śṛṅgāra*, other *rasas* were as effective. When he depicted Bali's *raudra*, spectators are believed to have become terrified themselves, for his eyes were his rare gift.

It has already been mentioned that the combined acting of Vidushaka and Nayaka by Potiyil Narayana Chakyar and Madhava Chakyar had unparalleled dramatic vigour and appeal. They also got together for performances even on occasions where combined acting was not necessary.

Usually, Chennamangalam Siva temple held Kūṭtu during February-March. Once, in addition to Kuttancherry Narayana Chakyar (who usually frequented that temple), Potiyil Narayana Chakyar also reached there at the request of the Head of Paliyam royal family. A relative of the family remarked: "If Kidangur Madhavan also comes here now, it will be complete!"

On this, Madhava Chakyar also sent for, and on the first day was a performance of Panchalisvayamvara by Kuttancherry Chakyar. His *vak*, imbued with humour, was extremely entertaining to the audience. The next day Potiyil Chakyar presented 'Bhagavaddutu'. The atmosphere was charged with the sentiment of *bhakti*, and the Chakyar's voice resounded in the air. On the third day, since Madhava Chakyar was a man of few words, everyone thought that it would not succeed as much as the others. Madhava Chakyar narrated *Subhadraharanam prabandha*. He recited a *sloka*, explained the meaning, and rendered it in *abhinaya*, regaling the audience. The *sloka* was:

Enam tvamevanagarim naya balikāma-
pyājñāpayeti halinā vacaseiva giri-
lalāṭikassakhalu kaukkuṭikam yatim tam
Bhāmā vidarbhasutayorviditam nināya

Along with Rukmini and Satyabhama, Bhagavan Krishna, at the request of his brother, takes Arjuna disguised as a *sanyasi* to the abode of Subhadra, for a four-month stay there. The actor on this occasion takes the role of the different characters—Krishna, Balarama, the disguised *Sanyasi*, Rukmini and Satyabhama. This *sloka*, which gives a lot of scope to the actor, has two rare words in it—*lalatika* and *kaukkutika*. 'Lalatika' is a faithful servant who reads the mind of his master by merely watching his face (here Krishna himself is a *lalatika*). 'Kaukkutika' is a fastidious person who takes watchful, hesitant steps, afraid that he might hurt any living creature or get polluted by touching an impure object.

In 1895, Madhava Chakyar and Potiyil Narayana Chakyar went to Katattanatt palace. The ruler was a scholar and a lover of the arts. The programme was scheduled as fourteen days of Kūttu, and eight days Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Though rightfully the performance was to be conducted by Mani Chakyar, the other actors from the south were also included. After listening to Narayana Chakyar's Kūttu, the king bestowed presents on the actor. In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, Madhava Chakyar performed the second act of *Nagananda*. The first eight days of this performance are devoted to Jimutavahanāś Nirvāhana. Where the hero enacts the entire story of the first Act, as the heroine and also as her female-attendants. The heroine goes to the temple and devoutly prays, singing the song "Bhagavati Gauri" and strumming her *Veena*, for granting her wishes. When all her prayers are unanswered, her female attendants advise her to stop her prayers, as they are futile. When Malayavati (the heroine) does not listen to their words, one of them gets impatient and snatches the *veena* away. When Madhava Chakyar enacted this part, the king said, "She has taken away the *veena*" in great consternation. At the end of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance, the king presented a golden bracelet to Madhava Chakyar.

Kesva Kurup, the great Kathakali actor, became famous, as a result of the encouragement and support of the Maharaja of Cochin (who passed away in 1888). At the orders of the Maharaja, Kurup watched the performance of Madhava Chakyar's *Asokavanikankam Kūṭiyāṭṭam* several times.

This superb actor died in 1897. Rama Chakyar, his successor, nephew and disciple also subsequently became a famous actor.

Cheriyā Parisha Parameswara Chakyar

Parameswara Chakyar, the younger brother of Madhava Chakyar, also became renowned in *Vak*. Born in 1844, he studied Sanskrit *kavyas* and *natakas* under the tutelage of Putiyetattu Govindan Nambiar, who was also the teacher of Kaikkulangara Rama Varier.

Though Parameswara Chakyar was a great scholar, the general opinion was that his *vak* lacked enough humour and mass appeal. He is one of the codifiers of Mantrankam as it is performed today. He started the performance of Mantrankam Kūttu in Annamanata temple, as a family responsibility. His wife belonged to Chengamanad and he spent most of his time there. His son Kochu Damodaran Nambiar became famous for *pathaka* narration. Among the disciples of Parameswara Chakyar, the most famous one in Ammannur Chachu Chakyar. Parameswara Chakyar died in 1903.

Cheriyā Parisha Rama Chakyar

In recent times, there has been none as handsome as Rama Chakyar, in *vesha*. Born in 1855, he was trained under his uncles, Madhava Chakyar and Parameswara Chakyar. One Nambiar belonging to Kidangur has also taught Rama Chakyar.

Rama Chakyar could handle effectively all roles in Pacha, Katti, Kari, Minukku and Pazhuppu. Apart from permanent performance venues like the temple in Trippunithura, Irinjalakkuda, Muzhikulam, Trichur and Velloor, he also performed Kūṭiyāṭṭam in Panjal, Tottara, Poonjar temples. Along with his hero role, if Potiyil Narayana Chakyar,

Ammannur Chachu Chakyar or Kuttancherry Damodara Chakyar performed the role of Vidushaka, then the Kūṭiyāṭṭam became very interesting.

In 1939, the seventy-four-year-old Rama Chakyar acted as Vidushaka in Purnatrayisa temple, Tripunithura. The audience comprised several scholars, including Parikshit Raja. No one before had performed that part in *Ascharyachudamani*. This was codified and presented according to the orders of Parikshit Raja himself.

While the training was going on under the direction of Rama Chakyar, his role was not decided for the performance. On the day of performance, while others were getting made up, suddenly he announced that he would take the part of Maya Rama. Everyone suspected that he may not be effective, but the Chakyar played his part extremely well. (In the play, Ravana approaches Sita not disguised as a *Sanyasi*, but as 'illusory' Rama.) With his striking appearances, he performed with the vigour of a young man. Ravana's part was played by Painkulam Narayana Chakyar, the disciple and son of Rama Chakyar. While enacting the *sloka* 'Api vasavavaranasya..', Maya Rama fights with Airavata, and for 'Naham bandhuragatri..', Ravana fights with Diggajas. The King seeing both scenes of fighting, did not comment on which was better.

When this incident occurred, the Chakyar was suffering from cataract; but with the make-up he did not look old at all, and people said that with his lips properly made up, his appearance was exquisite. This great actor passed away in 1941.

VALIYA PARISHA

Valiya Parisha Sankara Narayana Chakyar

The ancestral family of Valiya Parisha belonged to Ambalappuzha. It seems that Sankara Narayana Chakyar belonging to this family was renowned in *vesha*, and he was especially known for the role of Azhakiya Ravana (Ravana the Dandy). He must have lived in mid-19th century.

But there is a reference in Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aitihyamala* (Part II) that Sankara Narayana Chakyar made a name for himself in *vak*. Now this family seems to have settled in Kazhakkootam in Thiruvananthapuram district. The Kathakali actor Tottam Namboothiri approached him for training, for there were no Chakyars in Alappuzha during the later part of the 19th century.

EVOOR

Evoor Damodara Chakyar

The native place of Damodara Chakyar is Evoor, which is about five miles south of Haripad. He is said to have written a *kavya* titled *Sivavilasam*.

MEKKATTU

The Chakyar family of Mekkattu is near Annamanata temple. It is believed that this family got merged in Valiya Parisha and the descendents stay in Kazhakkootam. It has

already been mentioned that Cheriya Parisha Parameswara Chakyar started the performance of Mantrankam in Annamanata temple. The rights for this performance earlier belonged to Mekkattu family.

MANI

The Mani family was originally located in Perinjalloor village in Talipparambu. Later Perinjalloor merged in Mani near Perambra. Earlier the rule was that all Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances should be staged first in the Siva temple, Talipparambu. According to this, it was the Perinjalloor Chakyar who codified plays for Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Therefore, among the Chakyar families, Perinjalloor enjoyed a superior status.

The most renowned among the great Chakyars from this family was Parameswara Chakyar, a contemporary of Melpattur Bhattachiri. He was the one who presented the twenty-one Acts of Ramayana, five Acts of *Nagananda* and other equally important plays in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam mode of presentation. When Melpattur Bhattachiri composed *Rajasuya prabandha*, he sent a copy to Parameswara Chakyar and he found out a mistake in the *kriya* portion. Though he is said to have informed Bhattachiri about this mistake, the latter died before this.

The critical text called *Natankusam* seems to have been composed in grudge against Parameswara Chakyar, because the Chakyar had criticized him for his mean conduct. Though the exact time of his life is not known, it could have been some time between 1605 and 1875.

The ancestors of Parameswara Chakyar were Parameswara Chakyar, Neelakantha Chakyar and Vasudeva Chakyar who were eminent actors. Among these, Neelakantha Chakyar was the author of *Kalyanasaugandhika vyayoga*, and also a great scholar. He lived in the 14th century (Malayalam era).

After the age of Melpattur, Mani Sreedhara Chakyar and Mani Neelakantha Chakyar became famous for both *vak* and *vesha*. It was Sreedhara Chakyar who arranged to hold Kūṭiyāṭṭam in Matayikkavu. In this temple as well as in Sri Rama temple. Kūṭiyāṭṭam is held in the *mandapa*.

Coming to more recent times, there were Parameswara Chakyar (1858-1923), Neelakantha Chakyar (1860-1944), Madhava Chakyar (1865-1898) and Narayana Chakyar (1870-1933), who were brothers. Though all of them were equally well-trained, it was Neelakantha Chakyar who made a mark. He was known for *vesha*, for he had excellent training, stage personality and capacity for *rasabhinaya*. His brother Parameswara Chakyar was an expert in *vak*. His younger brother Madhava Chakyar also became famous for *vak* before his untimely death. Madhava Chakyar was the disciple of the illustrious Potiyil Narayana Chakyar. Madhava Chakyar's younger brother Narayana Chakyar was a good teacher.

Parameswara Chakyar, the eldest brother, stayed in Killikkurissimangalam. He was the teacher and father-in-law of Padmasri Mani Madhava Chakyar.

KOYPA

The Koypa family originally belonged to the Vanneri region. Chennas Namboothiripad, the author of *Tantrasamucchaya*, had two contemporaries, Koypa Chattaru (Sastrasarman) Chakyar and Kandar (Neelakanthan) Chakyar. Once, while Chattaru Chakyar was narrating a *prabandha* composed by Namboothiripad in Govindapuram temple, he criticized the misrule of Samoothiri or Zamorin. In great anger, Samoothiri got the Chakyar killed, and confiscated his property. After the death of his elder brother, Kandar Chakyar left Vanneri and settled down in Trikkalloor. This must have happened in the 15th century during the time of Chennas Namboothiri.

While the members of the Koypa family stayed in Trikkalloor, some of them changed their religion. The remaining people left the place and settled in Pantalloor. A Chakyar known by the name Koypassan and his nephews Chaman Chakyar and Vasunni Chakyar were famous for *vak*. They performed in temples like Manjeri, Karikkadu, Nilamboor and Trikkalloor.

During the time of social disturbances in 1790-1791, the Koypa family left Eranad and settled in Painkulam. From then the Koypa Chakyars came to be known as Painkulam Chakyars. In this family Rama Chakyar, though short-lived, made a mark in the field of *vak* and *vesha*. While he stayed in Kanyakumari for worship in the Devi temple, he contracted small pox and died in 1848 at the age of twenty-eight.

After the death of Rama Chakyar, his nephew Narayana Chakyar got training under Kidangur Rama Pisharody and Cheriya Parisha Rama Chakyar. Adept in *vak*, he could handle any Vidushaka role effectively. His role of Surpanakha was superb. In 1972 he died in his seventy-eighth year.

This article also tries to remember some famous Nangiars who are given the task of narrating *slokas* on the stage, and performing the role of the heroine. Just like a Chakyar, the Nangiar is also expected to be a scholar in Sanskrit; if not, the recitation of *slokas* would not be effective. The training for a female actress is not less rigorous. For these reasons, until now the situations presented were either devoid of female characters or those in which women did not have an important role.

During the reign of the king of Cochin (d. 1809) Itteeri Panicker, the disciple of Kaplingattu Namboothiri, came to Trippunithura palace and took part in a Kathakali performance. After his enactment of the role of Ravana, the king asked his queen whether it was a good performance. The lady, herself a Nangiar, a good actress belonging to Irinjalakkuda, replied, "well, not bad. But Vaishnavana's flight in his plane seemed as though it was above the roof." She is said to have herself performed the role in the presence of Itteeri Paniker also, and convinced her audience about her point of view.

There was a renowned actress by the name Moozhikkulathu Puthiyedathu Kunjukkutty Nangiaramma. Her *abhinaya* as Lalita in Surpanakhanka, watching Sri Rama with mixed feelings of bashfulness, love, desire and fear, was so effective that the audience also used to watch in the same direction. The illustrious scholar Kodungallur Kunjunni Tampuran once admitted to his disciples that "I have also myself watched her Lalita with interest." He used to go to Moozhikulam, accompanied by his elder brother and poet Kunjikkuttan

Tampuran, only to watch the performance of that great actress. By then she was old, hunchbacked and arthritic. But she performed for the sake of these brothers, and later observed that her performance concealed her age and ailments. Though these great artists have ceased to exist in their mortal bodies, their memory will remain fresh for the people of Kerala.

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Translated from Malayalam by Sudha Gopalakrishnan.*